The African Slave and Martyr George of Damascus

Kaleb of Atlanta

Martyr George of Damascus (16 Nov OC / 3 Nov NC)

This story is recorded in the Laodicean manuscript of the Arabic Menologion and in the Calendar of Patriarch Macarius III ibn al-Za'im of Antioch (+1672) and is included in the Synaxarion of Hieromonk Macarius of Simonopetra Monastery on Mount Athos. His memory is not retained in the present Calendars of the Patriarchates, but there still exists a chapel dedicated the Martyr George of Damascus in the Orthodox cemetery just outside the city of Damascus.

At an unknown time in Damascus, there lived a Muslim who owned an African Christian slave. This slave was taken from his parents when he was still a child. George was forced to profess his master's religion, but returned to faith in Christ the Savior when he came of age. Other slaves reported this to the cruel owner. He instructed George to pray with him, promising freedom and honors as long as he remained a Muslim. Since the young man was adamant, he maintained his profession of the true faith. The Muslim mimicked the fury of his false prophet, and ordered that George be tied up. Thereupon, the Muslim threw him to the ground and ordered him to be stretched between four pillars. Then he took a sword and cut the Saint in two, down the middle.

The Christians of Damascus took the body of the martyr and buried him outside the city, praising and glorifying the Lord. Later they built a chapel over the Saint's tomb, where they commemorated him annually.

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My goal in commissioning this icon and transmitting this ancient story to English speakers was to bring to light the knowledge of our Saints whose memory have faded away. It is unfortunate how many Saints are no longer remembered. They aren't prayed to, they have no liturgies, they have no hymns, and no one takes them as patrons. It cuts us off from our tradition. With so few Black African Saints in our memory, I felt compelled to have the story of Martyr George of Damascus revealed to a wide audience with the hope that some may benefit from his prayers.

May the Holy Martyr George of Damascus intercede for us and incline our hearts to God through the holy ones long forgotten. Amen.
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“Saints of Africa” icon by Fr Jerome Sanderson, with Saint George of Damascus included